

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PONTA 00221 01 OF 02 032252Z
ACTION EUR-12

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PO
SUBJECT: MOTA AMARAL FORCED TO POSTPONE RESOLUTION OF AUTONOMY
FLAG QUESTION

REF: (A) PONTA DELGADA 172 OF 16 MAY 1977 AND (B) PONTA
DELGADA 0190

SUMMARY: AZOREAN REGIONAL GOVERNMENT (RGA) PRESIDENT DR. JOAO BOSCO MOTA AMARAL HAS ABANDONED PLANS TO RUSH A BILL THROUGH THE REGIONAL ASSEMBLY TO CREATE AN OFFICIAL AZOREAN FLAG -- SIMILAR TO THAT USED BY THE SEPARATISTS -- PRIOR TO THE SANTO CRISTO FESTIVAL IN LATE APRIL. BY SEEKING EARLY REGIONAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION OF THE EMOTIONAL AUTONOMY FLAG QUESTION, MOTA AMARAL HAD HOPED TO HEAD OFF A REPEAT OF LAST YEARS FESTIVAL'S SERIOUS POPULAR DISTURBANCES WHEN THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT ORDERED POLICE TO REMOVE THE SEPARATIST FLAG FROM THE MAIN SQUARE IN CENTRAL PONTA DELGADA. A NUMBER OF FACTORS PERSUADED THE RGA PRESIDENT THAT HIS OBJECTIVE WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO REACH NOW. THEY INCLUDED THE LACK OF TIME AND STRONG OPPOSITION BY THE REGIONAL SOCIALIST PARTY MINORITY. BUT PROBABLY MOST IMPORTANT WAS THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THE MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC WOULD REFUSE TO SIGN
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PAGE 02 PONTA 00221 01 OF 02 032252Z

INTO LAW A BILL PROVIDING FOR THE FLAG DESIGN FAVORED BY THE RGA, AN ACT WHICH MOTA AMARAL REALIZED WOULD INCREASE THE CHANCES OF SANTO CRISTO VIOLENCE HE WISHED TO AVOID. END SUMMARY.

1. BACKGROUND: ATTEMPTS BY POLICE TO REMOVE AN FLA FLAG FROM PONTA DELGADA'S MAIN SQUARE DURING LAST YEAR'S SANTO CRISTO FESTIVAL - SAO MIGUEL'S PREMIER RELIGIOUS EVENT - TRIGGERED

LARGE-SCALE VIOLENT DEMONSTRATIONS. THE INCIDENT ALSO SERIOUSLY STRAINED RELATIONS BETWEEN THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AND DR. MOTA AMARAL.

2. HERALDIC COMMISSION APPOINTED: IN ORDER TO ELIMINATE THE EMOTIONALLY CHARGED FLAG ISSUE AS A PRETEXT FOR RENEWED SEPARATIST DEMONSTRATIONS IN THIS YEAR'S SANTO CRISTO FESTIVAL SCHEDULED FOR LATE APRIL, MOTA AMARAL HAD INTENDED TO ENACT A LAW CREATING FOR THE FIRST TIME AN OFFICIAL AZOREAN REGIONAL FLAG AND COAT OF ARMS. TOWARD THIS END HE NAMED LAST YEAR AN HERALDIC COMMISSION COMPRISED OF HISTORIANS FROM THE REGION AS WELL AS AN HERALDIC EXPERT FROM THE PORTUGUESE ARMY TO ADVISE HIM. BY FEBRUARY 1978, THE COMMISSION HAD COME UP WITH ITS CHOICE FOR A FLAG -- A COMPACT SHIELD ENCLOSING A STYLIZED HAWK AND NINE STARS REPRESENTING THE ARCHIPELAGO'S NINE ISLANDS SUPERIMPOSED ON A BLUE AND WHITE FIELD.

3. MOTA AMARAL DISAGREES WITH COMMISSION'S CHOICE: WHILE HERALDICALLY CORRECT, MOTA AMARAL PRIVATELY OPPOSED THE COMMISSION'S USE OF A SHIELD (BUT NOT THE BLUE AND WHITE FIELD) ON THE GROUNDS THAT IT DID NOT INVOKE SUFFICIENTLY THE FREE FLYING AZOR (HAWK) SYMBOL FOUND ON ALL UNOFFICIAL VERSIONS OF THE AZOREAN FLAG SINCE THE REGION'S FIRST AUTONOMY MOVEMENT AT THE END OF THE LAST CENTURY, AND INDEED ON AZOREAN COINS MINTED AS EARLY AS THE 16TH CENTURY. HIS OWN CHOICE FOR A FLAG WAS SOMETHING CLOSE TO THE NEVER LEGALIZED 1895 AUTONOMY FLAG WHICH WAS COMPOSED OF NINE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 PONTA 00221 01 OF 02 032252Z

STARS ARRAYED OVER A LARGE SPREAD WINGED HAWK ON THE BLUE AND WHITE SGXRP.H HE WAS NOT ABOUT TO DISCARD THIS TRADITION SIMPLY BECAUSE LESS THAN THREE YEARS AGO THE FLA HAD ADOPTED AS ITS OWN A FLAG QUITE SIMILAR. (COMMENT: IN THE FLA'S VERSION THE HAWK'S WINGS DROOP DOWNWARD PROTECTIVELY EMBRACING THE NINE STARS. END COMMENT).

4. THE GROUNDWORK: MOTA AMARAL CHOSE MARCH 2, THE EIGHTY-THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT DECREE GRANTING LIMITED ADMINISTRATIVE AUTONOMY (LATER ENDED BY SALAZAR) TO THE THEN THREE AZOREAN DISTRICTS, TO PRESENT A TELEVISED REPORT TO THE AZOREAN PEOPLE ON PROGRESS TOWARD THE SELECTION OF THE REGION'S FIRST OFFICIAL FLAG. WHILE HIS PRESENTATION INCLUDED A BALANCED REVIEW

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PAGE 01 PONTA 00221 02 OF 02 032355Z
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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 2 OF 2 PONTA DELGADA 0221

OF ALL POSSIBLE FLAG CHOICES, INCLUDING THE HERALDIC COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATION, HE CLEARLY HOPED THAT HIS CAREFUL AND DETAILED ALLUSIONS TO THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF THE 1895 FLAG HE PRIVATELY FAVORED WOULD PRECIPITATE A GROUNDSWELL OF PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THAT VERSION.

5. FLA SUPPORTS MOTA AMARAL'S CHOICE: SINCE THAT TIME, THE PUBLIC, PARTICULARLY ON SAO MIGUEL, HAS IN FACT SHOWN ITSELF TO BE STRONGLY IN FAVOR OF MOTA AMARAL'S CHOICE. EVEN FLA LEADER JOSE DE ALMEIDA HAS QUIETLY INFORMED THE RGA OF ITS APPROVAL WHILE AT THE SAME TIME OMINOUSLY THREATENING THAT HIS SUPPORTERS WOULD NOT TOLERATE THE HERALDIC COMMISSION'S CHOICE OR ANY OTHER ONE THAT STRAYED FROM THE AZOREAN AUTONOMIST TRADITION.

6. MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: NONETHELESS, MOTA AMARAL SOON AFTER RELALIZED THAT EVEN WITH AN OVERWHELMING PSD MAJORITY IN THE REGIONAL ASSEMBLY, IT WOULD BE UNWISE TO SEEK THE LEGALIZATION OF THE AUTONOMY FLAG PRIOR TO THE LATE APRIL SANTO CRISTO FESTIVAL. BECAUSE OF A DESIRE TO DEMONSTRATE REGIONAL UNITY ON AN ISSUE OF PARAMOUNT SYMBOLIC IMPORTANCE, HE HAD HOPED TO BRING THE SOCIALIST PARTY AROUND TO HIS POSITION BEFORE THE VOTING. THIS PROVED IMPOSSIBLE. WHILE THE SOCIALISTS HAD RELUCTANTLY ACCEPTED THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 02 PONTA 00221 02 OF 02 032355Z

HERALDIC COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATION WITH ITS BLUE AND WHITE ROYAL COLORS, THEY REJECTED PUBLICLY MOTA AMARAL'S CHOICE AS TOO EASILY CONFUSED WITH THE FLA BANNER. ALTHOUGH NOT WITHOUT PRIVATE MISGIVINGS, THE SOCIALISTS WERE WILLING ON THIS ISSUE TO OPEN THEMSELVES TO DAMAGING PSD CRITICISM FOR NOT RESPECTING THE REGION'S TRADITIONS.

7. OTHER PROBLEMS: MOTA AMARAL HAD ALSO WISHED TO WIN PRIOR

APPROVAL FOR HIS VERSION FROM PRESIDENT EANES. HOWEVER, THERE HAD SIMPLY NOT BEEN ENOUGH TIME. OTHER OUTSTANDING PROBLEMS, MOST IMPORTANTLY THE NEED TO RESPOND TO THE COUNCIL OF MINISTER'S MARCH 15 DEADLINE FOR THE RGA'S CONCRETE PROPOSALS TO CONSOLIDATE AUTONOMY HAD TAKEN FIRST PRIORITY.

8. THE MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC ADDS FINAL STRAW: FINALLY, AND PERHAPS MOST IMPORTANTLY AT THIS JUNCTURE, WAS THE REAL POSSIBILITY THAT MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC GENERAL GALVAO DE FIGUEREIDO WOULD REFUSE TO SIGN INTO LAW A FLAG BILL PASSED BY THE REGIONAL ASSEMBLY. IN A RECENT CONVERSATION, THE MINISTER INFORMED AMCONSUL THAT HE WOULD BE INCLINED TO CHALLENGE THE CONSTITUTIONALITY OF ANY PROPOSAL FOR A REGIONAL FLAG THAT IN HIS MIND LACKED A CLEAR ALLUSION TO PORTUGUESE SOVERIGNTY OVER THE REGION. AND DESPITE ITS ROYAL BLUE AND WHITE COLORS, THE MINISTER JUDGED THE RGA FAVORED FLAG AS NOT PASSING HIS SOVERIGNTY TEST. HIS GROUNDS, WHICH HE VOLUNTEERED WERE CONSTITUTIONALLY SHAKEY, WERE THAT THE GOP HAD WANTED THE FLAG QUESTION RAISED AS PART OF THE REGIONAL ASSEMBLY'S SUBMISSION TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF A PROPOSED DEFINITIVE STATUTE OF AUTONOMY. THEREFORE, HE REASONED THAT A FLAG BILL PROPOSED SEPARATELY BY THE REGIONAL ASSEMBLY WOULD ALSO HAVE TO WIN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY APPROVAL.

9. IT WAS PROBABLY THE PROSPECT OF THE MINISTER'S ELEVENTH HOUR BLOCKAGE OF A REGIONAL ASSEMBLY FLAG BILL THAT FINALLY PERSUADED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 PONTA 00221 02 OF 02 032355Z

MOTA AMARAL THAT HE SHOULD NOT PRESS THE ISSUE NOW. SUCH AN ACT BY THE MINISTER WOULD HAVE SERVED AS A FAR WORSE PROVOCATION TO THE SEPARATISTS DURING THE SANTO CRISTO FESTIVITIES THAN THE FAILURE OF THE RGA TO ATTEMPT NOW THE LEGALIZATION OF A REGIONAL FLAG. THE RGA IS UNLIKELY TO BRING UP THE FLAG ISSUE AGAIN UNTIL THE MINISTER IS TRANSFERRED AND SOME UNDERSTANDING IS WORKED OUT WITH THE PS AND PRESIDENT EANES.
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